

29 October 2014

Dear Mammaw,

I'm pleased to hear you received my letter without incident. To be sure it's the first handwritten letter I've produced since my last letter to you many years ago. I know you prefer them and I enjoy writing them; when one must commit his words to the page by hand there is inherently more thought and consideration involved.

Forgive me if my letter comes off as a bit broken; I'm just writing my thoughts to you as they come to me in the present.

I'm turning 37 years old on Sunday, not worse for wear. I remember when I turned 13. I was at Jackie's house. I remember the smell of being in a cabin in the woods. I took that for granted as now having a cabin in the woods, that escape, is such a luxury for us here in Toronto. That November we had cake (or something) and she celebrated with Jennifer and I that we were now TEENAGERS! Whether or not that would prove to be a good thing was yet to be seen, but I was happy to share that milestone moment with Jackie all the same.

On February 11<sup>th</sup> Simon and I will be celebrating our ninth wedding anniversary. Mammaw, I'm so incredibly blessed; I married my best friend. His name is Simon Chan. He's nine years my senior... and he has the spirit and the eyes of a friend nine my junior.

Our house is right in the middle of one of the last standing residential neighborhoods in downtown Toronto. It's called Cabbagetown for the late 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Irish immigrants who built and lived in these old homes. They grew cabbages in the small patches of dirt affront their lot.

We have four cats, two aquariums, and two gardens. It's a lot of work, but it keeps us busy.

And sane. This is Riley.



Sophie



Shadow



Maggie



The four with my first cat, Nalli in the back left. She's gone. But she started the whole thing. ☺



The three new kittens were rescues. From across the street we found them, weaned them, and predictably adopted them in whole. One, two, three on the right of screen.

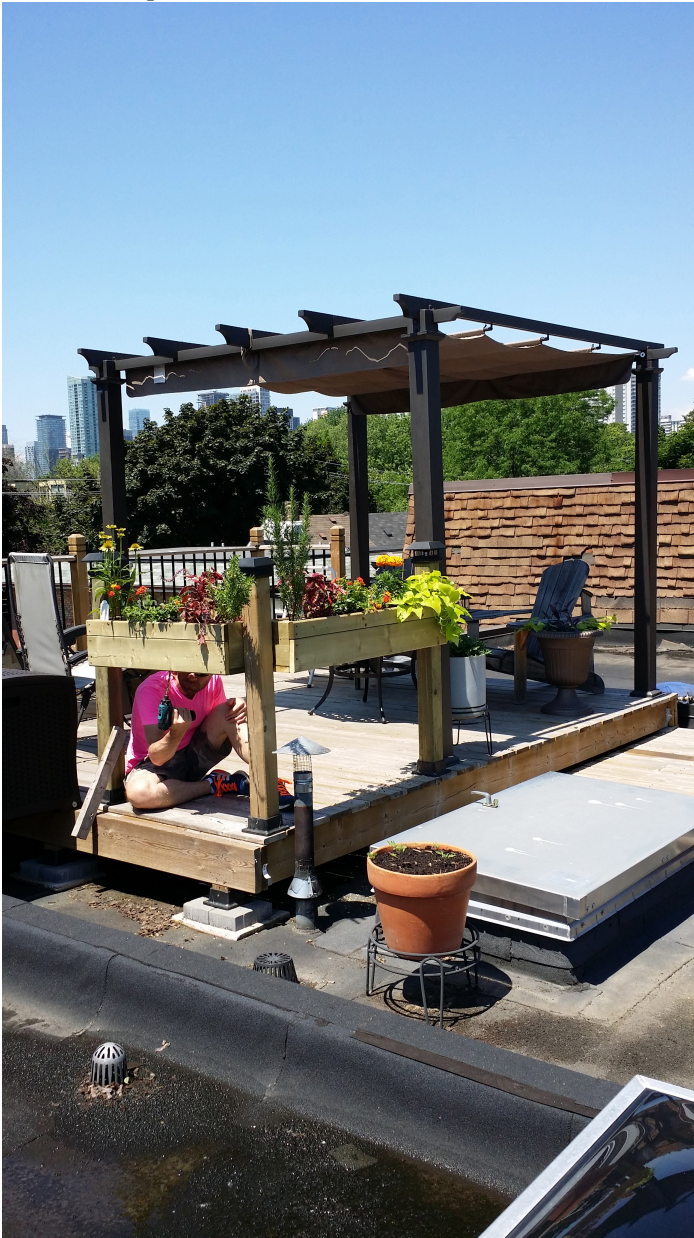
I gutted the backyard and built in garden beds, stone, and furnished the space. It's great for entertaining but receives very little light. Simon must have a garden.

Our house is three stories with a flat roof; the only space with light was up. After months of The City waving their fingers 'no' at us for any attempt to build stair access to the roof we turned to Gray Family Ingenuity; we burst a hole through the ceiling and installed a commercial grade roof hatch. In this reclaimed space I built a large bi-level rooftop deck, about 14' square with flower beds and entertainment space. There are garden beds where we grow heirloom tomatoes, cucumbers for pickling, summer squash, cantaloupes and watermelons to name a few. The cats love it up there. When they're not soaking up the sun they're chasing off the squirrels that sometimes nip at the watermelons. It's like a nature show up there!

Simon with watermelon



The rooftop.





Simon is a chiropractor with a healthy practice. We moved to Canada to be near his mother. She spends six months a year in Canada. Simon's father insisted and we didn't bat an eye. Chinese families are built on a hierarchy, never questioned, never challenged. The move proved serendipitous. I love and miss my home, but I'm not certain I will ever return to live in the United States.

We are actively contributing members of the Toronto Humane Society and the Ontario SPCA. It is our sole beneficiary. I want to be careful in how I say this but SickKids hospital easily gets hundreds of millions each year. It is the "Go-To" charity here in Toronto. Our pets are our Kids. We love them and exclusively support them and their kind. Somebody has to.

While in Canada I have still been actively composing for American clients; my Canadian music presence has grown too. In 2012, I was scooped up from a quiet music teaching practice to take a full-time position composing and arranging for the Royal Conservatory of Music. It was wonderful. Imagine in today's modern world a composer actually having an office of his own. I had a budget and a support team. It's like something out of tin-pan alley in the 1920's. Unreal. In this 12-month period I had 66 works published which are now distributed worldwide.

## My Studio



In 2010, I composed a large work for the Talespin Ensemble (a children's storytelling musical group) in collaboration with The Vienna Boys' Choir. Upon its premier in Vienna in April of 2010 the Choir brought Simon and I to Vienna to participate. It was one of the most tremendous joys of my life.

While I still compose my principal engagement is teaching. I run Cabbagetown Piano Studio where I exclusively teach adult music students in traditional piano, jazz, improvisation, and pop. I have some composition students as well. I require all of my students to sign up for "the buffet." I want my students to become complete, authentic musicians. No button-pushers, no piano-typers in my studio.

I should bring this to a close.

While we are not close in proximity we are fixed at the heart. I love my family. I love my Dad. I love you Jackie. And I love you Mammaw.

Jason